

Assessment of the Non-Ceramic Finds from Wrangle (WEMR 05)

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The non-ceramic finds from an archaeological excavation at Wrangle, Lincolnshire, undertaken by Will Munford for Pre-Construct Archaeology (Lincoln) Ltd were submitted to the author for identification and assessment.

The finds consist of bone, ceramic building material, copper alloy, fired clay, iron, stone and wood charcoal. Most of these were stratified in association with Anglo-Scandinavian pottery and are consistent with a late 9th to 11th-century date.

Description

Bone

Three bone artefacts were submitted. They consist of a spindle whorl, made from the sawn top of a femur with a hole drilled through it (context 112) and two crude awls made by cutting a bone (possibly a cannon bone) diagonally and then roughly trimming the remaining end (from contexts 115 and 243).

Ceramic Building Material

Four fragments of ceramic building material were recovered. These consist of three fragments of brick and two fragments of flat roof tile. One brick and the flat tile, from contexts 118 and 248 were made in a fine, calcareous fabric probably of late post-medieval or 19th-century date. The brick from context 247 is made in a silty, calcareous clay and contains sparse straw impressions. This brick is more typical of a late medieval to early post-medieval date (i.e. late 14th to 17th century).

Copper Alloy

Two copper alloy objects were recovered. That from context 129 is an unidentified strip, possibly cast, which has a U-shaped cross section with a flattened end which may have been nailed or riveted. It is possible that it is a decorative binding strip, used on wooden objects and furniture, possibly to secure a textile or leather covering.

That from context 247 consists of five fragments of an object made of a narrow strip of sheet metal, possibly deliberately folded in half and possibly slightly expanded at the ends opposite the fold. This might be a pair of tweezers.

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The possible cast strip is stratified in a medieval deposit and should be x-rayed and submitted to a specialist in medieval small finds for identification and reporting. The object also requires a conservation assessment and packaging.

The object from context 247 is from a late context and is therefore either residual or of late post-medieval or modern date.

Fired Clay

Thirty-three fragments of fired clay were recovered from the excavation. Most of these consist of small featureless fragments which cannot be identified. However, some of the larger fragments have a flat face and in one case the fragment has two flat faces, at right angles. The fabric contains abundant quartz and muscovite silt and numerous voids of various types. The two most common void types are, firstly, circular-cross-sectioned, between 1.5mm and 2.0mm in diameter, curved and sometimes lined with iron-rich concretions and, secondly, circular cross-sectioned, between 0.05mm and 1.0mm in diameter and usually without concretions. In both cases it is likely that these voids were present in the raw clay, probably as insect burrows and rootlets.

The finds occur in small groups mainly in features producing Anglo-Scandinavian pottery.

The most likely interpretation of these fragments is that they are the remains of rectangular bricks cut from silty subsoil with a spade and then fired, either accidentally or as part of an industrial process. In the late medieval and early post-medieval periods such bricks or turfs were used as part of the salt extraction process (McAvoy 1994). Although it is not certain that this process was used earlier in the medieval period, there are similar fragments from Spalding which are probably of 12th-century or earlier date. The fact that the fragments occur in such small quantities may indicate that they are residual and certainly could have been transported through various mechanisms for some distance from their original place of use.

Iron

Three possible fragments of iron were recovered. In two cases these fragments include straw in their corrosion products and are likely to be heavily corroded iron objects. It is also possible that they are the result of panning, being formed perhaps in voids in the subsoil such as those observed in the fired clay fragments.

Stone

Nine groups of stone were recovered from the excavations. One of these, from context 247, is an angular fragment of high-grade coal and is probably fuel. Those from contexts 112, 243 another piece from context 247 and possibly a piece from context 219 are probably unworked erratic pebbles.

Fragments from contexts 107, 129 and 169 and badly weathered and very friable pieces of Mayen lava quern. It is quite possible that all the pieces come from the same quern. Such querns were first imported into eastern England in the later Roman period but continued to be imported in the mid Saxon, Anglo-Scandinavian and post-conquest medieval periods.

Finally, a sliver of Norwegian Ragstone, a schist from the Eidsborg region of southern Norway, was recovered from context 130. This stone was imported in large quantities to Eastern England in the medieval period, starting before the Norman Conquest, and was used to produce whetstones. Production waste from the town ditch at Ludgate, City of London, shows that the finishing of these hones took place in England, but whether all English finds were re-distributed from London rather than being produced at other centres is unknown.

Wood

Four fragments from context 248 come from wood charcoal. At x20 magnification, the tarry appearance of these fragments suggests that they are debris from a wood-burning fire rather than professionally-produced charcoal.

Assessment

The earliest stratified finds come from a series of ditches and pits containing pottery dating between the late 9th and the 11th centuries. These include fragments of quern from pits 108 and 170, the two bone points (pit 116 and ditch 242 and fragments of fired clay from ditches 217 and 136/242.

Finds from possibly later features, gullies 182 and 305 and pit 111, consist mainly of fired clay, of similar type to that from the earlier features, quern fragments, the Norwegian Ragstone hone, a copper alloy object and the bone spindle whorl. Apart from the copper alloy object and the hone, all are of similar character to finds from the earlier features and even these two finds are conceivably of pre-conquest date.

Finally, the finds from pit 248 consist of ceramic building material, including pieces of late post-medieval or earlier modern appearance, coal and charcoal, probably indicative of the disposal of domestic ashes, a possible iron object (whose poor condition suggests it is residual) and the fragments of copper alloy sheet

Further work

The majority of these finds are consistent with an Anglo-Scandinavian date and are probably contemporary with the majority of the pottery from the excavations. Such an assemblage, on a site with very little earlier or later occupation evidence, is of some interest because of the difficulty on multi-period sites of dating non-ceramic finds of undiagnostic character.

Therefore, there is a strong case for publishing a full catalogue of these finds. This would require conservation assessment and x-radiography of the two copper alloy finds and then the submission of these finds to a specialist on finds of this period for cataloguing and comparative study.

Retention

All the finds, with the possible exception of those from pit 248, should be retained for future study.

Costing

The copper alloy finds should be submitted to a conservation laboratory for costing of the recommended assessment, packaging and x-radiography.

A specialist study of the copper alloy and bone artefacts would cost about £100 and the production of a publishable report on the remaining finds (incorporating the specialist report) would cost £188 plus VAT (one day at £23.50 per hour).

Bibliography

McAvoy, F. (1994) "Marine Salt Extraction: The Excavation of Salterns at Wainfleet St Mary, Lincolnshire." *Medieval Archaeology*, XXXVIII (1994), 134-163.

Appendix 1

context	cname	subfabric	Form	Nosh	NoV	Action	Description	Part	Weight	Use	L	B	TH	Condition
107	STONE	VESICULAR LAVA	QUERN	4	1			BS	123					
112	BONE	FEMUR HEAD	SPWH	1	1		DRILLED HOLE	BS	4					
112	IRON		CONCRETION	1	1		NO SURVIVING METAL;WOOD/CHARCOAL IN CORROSION PRODUCTS	BS	12					
112	FCLAY	SILTY MICACEOUS;ROOTLET HOLES;CLAY/IRON CONCRETIONS		5	5			BS	149					
112	STONE	LIMESTONE	GEO	1	1			BS	22					
112	STONE	JET	GEO	1	1			BS	8					
115	BONE		POINT	1	1		LONGBONE SAWN AT ONE END AND FASHIONED TO A POINT AT OTHER	BS	41					
118	PMTIL	FINE CALCAREOUS BODY	FLAT	1	1			BS	21					
129	STONE	VESICULAR LAVA	QUERN	14	1			BS	493					
129	FCLAY	SILTY MICACEOUS;ROOTLET HOLES;CLAY/IRON CONCRETIONS	BRICK?	1	1		FLAT FACE	BS	8					
129	FCLAY	SILTY MICACEOUS;ROOTLET HOLES;CLAY/IRON CONCRETIONS	BRICK?	1	1		BEVELLED FACE	BS	38					
129	COPP		OBJECT	1	1	XRAY;CONS	STRIP; POSSIBLY CAST;FLATTENED AT ONE END WITH TWO	BS	5					

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context	cname	subfabric	Form	Nosh	NoV	Action	Description	Part	Weight	Use	L	B	TH	Condition
130	STONE	NORWEGIAN RAGSTONE	HONE	1	1		SMALL HOLES PIERCING METAL;U-SECTIONED AT OTHER END;BINDING STRIP?							
156	FCLAY	SILTY MICACEOUS;ROOTLET HOLES;CLAY/IRON CONCRETIONS		5	5			BS	12					
169	STONE	VESICULAR LAVA	QUERN	6	1			BS	344					
183	FCLAY	SPARSE SILTY MICACEOUS;ROOTLET HOLES;CLAY/IRON CONCRETIONS		1	1		SPLIT ALONG LEAF IMPRESSION	BS	18					
183	FCLAY	SILTY MICACEOUS;ROOTLET HOLES;CLAY/IRON CONCRETIONS		1	1			BS	8					
208	FCLAY	SILTY MICACEOUS;ROOTLET HOLES;CLAY/IRON CONCRETIONS		1	1			BS	22					
211	FCLAY	SILTY MICACEOUS;ROOTLET HOLES;CLAY/IRON CONCRETIONS		8	8			BS	293					
216	FCLAY	SILTY MICACEOUS;ROOTLET HOLES;CLAY/IRON CONCRETIONS	BRICK?	1	1		TWO FLAT FACES AT RIGHT ANGLES	BS	64					
219	STONE	MICACEOUS FLAGGY SST	GEO?	1	1			BS	100					
243	BONE		POINT	1	1		METAPODIAL? CRUDELY TRIMMED AT ONE END	BS	15					
243	FCLAY	SPARSE SILTY		1	1			BS	5					

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context	cname	subfabric MICACEOUS;ROOTLET HOLES;CLAY/IRON CONCRETIONS	Form	Nosh	NoV	Action	Description	Part	Weight	Use	L	B	TH	Condition
243	STONE	BASIC IGNEOUS	GEO	1	1			BS	16					
243	IRON		CONCRETION	2	1		NO SURVIVING METAL;STRAW IN CORROSION PRODUCTS	BS	34					
245	FCLAY	SILTY MICACEOUS;ROOTLET HOLES;CLAY/IRON CONCRETIONS		1	1			BS	2					
247	STONE	COAL	COAL	1	1			BS	12					
247	COPP		TWEEZERS?	5	1	XRAY;CONS	SHEET METAL FOLDED IN HALF;SLIGHTLY EXPANDING TOWARDS ENDS	BS	3					
247	STONE	ORGANIC MUDSTONE	GEO	1	1			BS	1					
247	MTIL	SILTY MICACEOUS;STRAW IMPRESSIONS	BRICK	2	1			BS	161				64	
248	IRON		NAIL/CONCRETION	2	1		NO SURVIVING METAL;STRAW IN CORROSION PRODUCTS	BS	5					
248	PMTIL	FINE CALCAREOUS BODY	BRICK?	1	1			BS	3					
248	WOOD	CHARCOAL	CHARCOAL	4	4			BS	10					
249	FCLAY	SILTY MICACEOUS;ROOTLET HOLES;CLAY/IRON CONCRETIONS		1	1			BS	10					
273	FCLAY	SILTY MICACEOUS;ROOTLET HOLES;CLAY/IRON CONCRETIONS		4	4			BS	48					
304	FCLAY	SILTY		1	1			BS	2					

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context	cname	subfabric	Form	Nosh	NoV	Action	Description	Part	Weight	Use	L	B	TH	Condition
309	FCLAY	SILTY MICACEOUS;ROOTLET HOLES;CLAY/IRON CONCRETIONS		1	1			BS	2					